

HIGHER PRAGMATISM

Story of How a Diffident Lover Got Out of the Amateur Class.

By O. HENRY.

Once upon a time I found a ten-cent magazine lying on a bench in a little city park. Anyhow, that was the amount he asked me for when I sat on the bench next to him. He was a musty, dingy, tattered magazine, with some queer stories bound in him, I was sure. He turned out to be a scrap book.

"I am a newspaper reporter," I said to him, to try him. "I have been detailed to write up some of the experiences of the unfortunate ones who spend their evenings in this park. May I ask you to what you attribute your downfall in—"

I was interrupted by a laugh from my purchase—a laugh so rusty and unpracticed that I was sure it had been his first for many a day.

"Oh, no, no," said he. "You ain't a reporter. Reporters don't talk that way. They pretend to be one of us, and say they've just got in on the blind baggage from St. Louis. I can tell a reporter on sight. Us park bums get to be fine judges of human nature. We sit here all day and watch the people go by. I can size up anybody who walks past my bench in a way that would surprise you."

"Well," I said, "go on and tell me. How do you size me up?"

"I should say," said the student of human nature, with unpronounceable hesitation, "that you was, say, in the contracting business—or maybe worked in a store—or was a sign-painter."

I frowned gloomily.

"But, judging again," went on the reader of men, "I'd say you ain't got a wife."

"No," said I, rising restlessly. "No, no, no. I ain't. But I will have, by the arrows of Cupid! That is, if—"

My voice must have trailed away and muffled itself in uncertainty and despair.

"I see you have a story yourself," said the dusty vagrant—impudently, it seemed to me. "Suppose you take your dime back and spin your yarn for me. I'm interested myself in the ups and downs of unfortunate ones who spend their evenings in the park."

Somehow that amused me. I looked at the frowzy derelict with more interest. I did have a story. Why not tell it to him? I had told none of my friends.

"Jack," said I.

"Mack," said he.

"Mack," said I, "I'll tell you."

"Do you want the dime back in advance?" said he.

I handed him a dollar.

"The dime," said I, "was the price of listening to your story."

"Right on the point of the jaw," said he. "Go on."

And then, incredible as it may seem to the lovers in the world who confide their sorrows only to the night wind and the gibbous moon, I laid bare my secret to that wreck of all things that you would have supposed to be in sympathy with love.

I told him of the days and weeks and months that I had spent in adorning Mildred Telfair. I spoke of my despair, my grievous days and wakeful nights, my dwindling hopes and distress of mind. I even pictured to this night-prowler her beauty and dignity.

"Why don't you cop the lady out?" asked Mack, bringing me down to earth and dialect again.

I explained to him that my worth was so small, my income so minute and my fears so large that I hadn't the courage to speak to her of my worship. I told him that in her presence I could only blush and stammer, and that she looked upon me with a wonderful, maddening smile of amusement.

"Now that reminds me of my own case. I'll tell you about it," said Mack.

I was indignant, but concealed it. "Feel my muscle," said my companion, suddenly flexing his biceps. I did so mechanically. The fellows in gyms are always asking you to do that. His arm was as hard as cast iron.

"Four years ago," said Mack, "I could lick any man in New York outside of the professional ring. Your case and mine is just the same. I come from the West side—between Thirtieth and Fourteenth—I won't give the number on the door. I was a scrapper when I was ten, and when I was twenty no amateur in the city could stand up four rounds with me. 'S a fact. You know Bill McCarty? No? He managed the smokers for some of them swell clubs. Well, I knocked out everything Bill brought up before me. I was a middleweight, but could train down to a welter when necessary. I boxed all over the West side at bouts and benefits and private entertainments, and was never put out once."

"But, say, the first time I put my foot in the ring with a professional I was no more than a canned lobster. I dunno how it was—I seemed to lose heart. I guess I got too much imagination. There was a formality and publicness about it that kind of weakened my nerve. I never win a fight in the ring. Lightweight and all kinds of scrubs used to sign up with my manager and then walk up and tap me on the wrist and see me fall. The minute I see the crowd and a lot of gents in evening clothes down in front, and seen a professional come inside the ropes, I got as weak as ginger ale."

"Of course it wasn't long till I couldn't get no backers, and I didn't have any more chances to fight a professional—or many amateurs, either. But lemme tell you—I was as good as most men inside the ring or out. It was

just that dumb, dead feeling I had when I was up against a regular that always done me up.

"One evening I was walking along near the Bowery, thinking about things, when along comes a slumming party. About six or seven they was, all in swallowtails and these silk hats that don't shine. One of the gang kind of shoves me off the sidewalk. I hadn't had a scrap in three days, and I just says, 'De-lighted!' and hits him back of the ear."

"Well, we had it. That Johnnie put up as decent a little fight as you'd want to see in the moving pictures. It was on a side street, and no cops around. The other guy had a lot of science, but it only took me about six minutes to lay him out."

"Some of the swallowtails dragged him up against some steps and began to fan him. Another one of 'em comes over to me and says:

"Young man, do you know what you've done?"

"Oh, bent it," says I. "I've done nothing but a little punching-bag work. Take Freddy back to Yale and tell him to quit studying sociology on the wrong side of the sidewalk."

"My good fellow," says he, "I don't know who you are, but I'd like to. You've knocked out Reddy Burns, the champion middleweight of the world. If you—"

"But when I come out of my faint I was laying on the floor in a drug store, saturated with aromatic spirits of ammonia. If I'd known that was Reddy Burns I'd have got down in the gutter and crawled past him instead of handing him one like I did. Why, if I'd ever been in a ring and seen him climbing over the ropes I'd have been all to the sal volatile."

"Well, I must be going," I said, rising and looking with elaborate care at my watch.

When I was 20 feet away the park benches called to me.

"Much obliged for the dollar," he said. "And for the dime. But you'll never get 'er. You're in the amateur class."

"Serves you right," I said to myself, "for hobnobbing with a tramp. His impudence!"

But, as I walked, his words seemed to repeat themselves over and over again in my brain. I think I even grew angry at the man.

"I'll show him!" I finally said aloud.

"I'll show him that I can fight Reddy Burns, too—even knowing who he is."

I hurried to a telephone booth and rang up the Telfair residence.

A soft, sweet voice answered. Didn't I know that voice? My hand holding the receiver shook.

"Is that you?" said I, employing the foolish words that form the vocabulary of every talker through the telephone.

"Yes, this is I," came back the answer in the low, clear-cut tones that are an inheritance of the Telfairs.

"Who is it, please?"

"It's me," said I, less ungrammatically than egotistically. "It's me, and I've got a few things that I want to say to you right now and immediately straight to the point."

"Dear me," said the voice. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Arden!"

I wondered if any accent on the first word was intended.

"Yes," said I. "I hope so. And now to come down to brass tacks. I thought that rather a vernacularism, if there is such a word, as soon as I had said it; but I didn't stop to apologize."

"You know, of course, that I love you and that I have been in that idiotic state for a long time. I don't want any more foolishness about it—that is, I mean I want an answer from you right now. Will you marry me or not? Hold the wire, please. Keep out, Central. Hello, hello! Will you, or will you not?"

That was just the upper-cut for Reddy Burns' chin. The answer came back:

"Why, Phil, dear, of course I will! I didn't know that you—that is, you never said—oh, come up to the house, please—I can't say what I want to over the phone. You are so important. But please come up to the house, won't you?"

Would it?

I rang the bell of the Telfair house violently. Some sort of a human came to the door and shooed me into the drawing-room.

"Oh, well," said I to myself, looking at the ceiling, "any one can learn from any one. That was a pretty good philosophy of Mack's, anyhow. He didn't take advantage of his experience, but I get the benefit of it. If you want to get into the professional class, you've got to—"

I stopped thinking then. Some one was coming down the stairs. My knees began to shake. I knew then how Mack had felt when a professional began to climb over the ropes. I looked around foolishly for a door or a window by which I might escape if it had been any other girl approaching I mightn't have—

But just then the door opened and Miss Mildred's younger sister, came in. I'd never seen her look so much like a glorified angel. She walked straight up to me, and—

I'd never noticed before what perfectly wonderful eyes and hair Eliza both Telfair had.

"Phil," she said, in the Telfair, sweet, thrilling tones, "Why didn't you tell me about it before? I thought it was sterner you wanted all the time, until you telephoned to me a few minutes ago!"

I suppose Mack and I always will be hopeless amateurs. But, as the thing has turned out in my case, I'm mighty glad of it.

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The skeleton of what he claims is the oldest prehistoric man yet found recently was discovered in Germany East Africa by a Berlin scientist.

FABLES IN SLANG

GEORGE ADE

THE NEW FABLE OF THE ROISTERING BLADES WHO ABSORBED THE MAGNETIC CURRENT DIRECT FROM THE CENTRAL STORAGE PLANT.

Out in the Celery Belt of the Hinterland there is a stunted Flag-Station. Number Six, carrying one Day Coach and a Combination Baggage and Stock Car, would pause long enough to unload a Bucket of Oysters and take on a Crate of Eggs.

In this Settlement the Leading Citizens still wear Gum Arctics with large Buckles, and Parched Corn is served at Social Functions.

Two highly-respected Money-Getters of pure American Stock held forth in this lonesome Kraal and did a General Merchandizing.

One was called Milt, in honor of the Blind Poet, and the other claimed the following brief Moniker, to wit: Henry.

Neither of them had to pay the Woman who did the Housework. Henry and Milt got what they could during the Daytime and always stood ready to trim up the Dark Lanterns and operate at Night.

These two Pillars of Society had marched at the head of the Women and School Children during the Dry Movement which banished King Alcohol from their Fair City.

As a result of their Efforts Liquor was not to be obtained in this Town except at the Drug Stores and Restaurants or in the Cellar underlying any well-conducted Home.

For Eleven Months and Three Weeks out of every Calendar year these two played Right and Left Tackle in the Stubborn Battle to Uplift the Community and better the Moral Tone.

They walked the Straight and Narrow, wearing Blinders, Check-Reins, Hobbles and Interference Pads.

Very often a Mother would hurry her little Brood to the Front Window when Milt or Henry passed by carrying under his arm a Package of Corn Flakes and the Report of the General Secretary in charge of Chinese Missionary Work.

"Look!" she would say, indicating Local Paragon with index finger. "If you always walk behind the Ears and learn your Catechism, you may grow up to be like Him."

But—every Autumn, about the time the Frost is on the Stock Market and Wall Street is in the Shock, Milt and Henry would do a Skylark Ascension from the Home Nest and Wing away toward the Rising Sun.

They called it Fall Buying, because both of them Bought and both of them Fell.

At Home neither of them would Kick In for any Pastime more worldly than a 10-cent M. P. Show depicting a large number of Insane People falling over Precipices.

The Blow-Off came on the Trip to the City. That was the Big Show.

Every Nickel that could be held out went into the little Tin Bank, for they knew that when they got together 100 of these Washers, a man up in New York would let them have some Tiffany Water of Rare Vintage, with a Napkin wrapped around it as an Evidence of Good Faith.

On Winter Evenings, Milt would don the Velvet Slippers and grill his Lower Extremities on the ornate Portico such as surrounds every high-price Base-Burner.

While thus crisp himself he loved to read News Notes from Gotham, signed Carolyn Stuyvesant, who seemed to have the Entree into the Best Houses.

He did not know that Carolyn had tangled Whiskers and jotted down his Boudoir Secrets in a Weinstube, using a borrowed Pencil.

So he believed what it said in the Paper about a well-known Heiress having the Teeth of her favorite Pomeranian filled with Radium at a Cost of \$120,000.

Whenever he got this kind of a Private Peek into the Gay Life of the Modern Babylon, he began to breathe through his Nose and tug at the Leash.

He longed to dash away on the Erie to look at the Iron Fence in front of the Home of the Pomeranian.

When the Day of Days arrived, Milt and Henry would be seen at the Depot with congested Suit-Cases and their Necks all newly shaven and powdered for the approaching Jubilee.

Each had pinned into his college-made Suit enough currency to lift the Debt on the Parsonage.

Already they were smoking Foreign Cigars and these were a mere Hint of what the Future had in Store.

While waiting for Number Six they wired for Two Rooms and Two Baths and to have Relays waiting in the Manicure Parlor.

he came out of the Dark Room and began to open small Original Packages.

When they approached the Metropolis, via the Tunnel, they thought they were riding in on a Curtiss Bi-Plane.

Between the Taxi and the Register they stopped to shake hands with an Old Friend who wore a White Suit and was known from Coast to Coast as the originator of a Pick-Me-Up which called for everything back of the Working Board except the License and the Bicarbonate of Soda.

The Clerk let on to remember them and quoted a Bargain Rate of Six Dollars, meaning by the Day and not by the Month.

They wanted to know if that was the Best he had and he said it was, as the Sons of Ohio were having a Dinner in the Main Banquet Hall.

So they ordered a lot of Supplies sent up to each Room and wanted to know if there was a Good Show in Town—something that had been denounced by the Press.

The Clerk told of one in which Asbestos Scenery was used and Firemen had to stand in the Wings, so they tore over to the News Stand and bought two on the Aisle for \$8 from a pale Goddess who kept looking at the Ceiling all during the Negotiations.



The Flag Station Seemed Far Away.

tions, for she seemed out of Sympathy with her Sordid Surroundings.

Then to the Rooms with their glittering Bedsteads and insulting prodigality of Towels.

After calling up the Office to complain of the Service, they shook the Moth Balls out of their Henry Millers and began to sort the Studs.

When fully attired in Evening Clothes, including the Sheet-Iron Shoes, they knew they looked like New York Club Men and the Flag Station seemed far away, as in another World.

Instead of the usual 6:30 Repast of Chipped Beef in Cream, Sody Biscuits and a Stoup of Gunpowder Tea, they ordered up Cape Cods, Potato Lett-go-at-that, Sweetbreads So-and-so, on and on past the partially heated Duck and Salad with Fringe along the Edges and Cheese that had waited too long and a Check for \$17.40 and the Waiter peevish at being slipped a paltry \$1.60.

Heigh-ho! It is a Frolicking Life! Pity the Poor Folks who are now getting ready to court the Flax in Akron, Ohio, and Three Oaks, Michigan, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, with no thought of what they are Missing.

They remembered afterward being in a gilded Play-House with the Activities equally divided between a Tramp-Drummer and 700 restless Young Women.

Then, being assailed by the Pangs of Hunger, they went out and purchased Crab Flakes at 20 cents a Flake, after which they paid to get their Hats and next Morning they were back in their rooms, entirely surrounded by Towels.

On the third Afternoon, Milt suspended Fall Buying long enough to send his Family a Book of Views showing the Statue of Peter Cooper, the Aviary in Bronx Park and Brooklyn Bridge by Moonlight.

Then, with a Clear Conscience, he went back and put his Foot on the Rail.

The morning on which their Bodies were taken the Pennsylvania Station broke bright and cheery.

Milt said somebody had fed him a Steam Radiator and put Mittens on him and unscrewed his Knee-Caps.

Otherwise, he was O. K. Henry kept waving the English Sparrows out of the Way, and asking why so many Bells were ringing.

Two weeks later, at the Union Revival Services, when Rev. Polindexter gave out that rousing old Stand-By which begins "Yield Not to Temptation," Milt and Henry arose from the Cushioned Seats and sang their fool Heads off.

MORAL: One who would put Satan on the Mat must get inside information from his Training Quarters.

DISPOSED OF FAMILY "PET"

Mr. Bildo Bore Much With Fortitude but There Came a Time When Patience Failed.

"Did you ever have a dog in the family?" asked Bildo. "We did recently. How that dog got into the family, I don't know. Each member of the household went around saying 'I am sorry they got that dog' by the time we had had him a week."

"There was never any way of telling who was responsible for his presence with us. No one claimed the credit of it."

"We disposed of him because he took a piece out of a man's trousers. It was a peddler's trousers. It is a bad thing to let a dog bite a peddler."

"The peddler stormed up to my door a day or so after the event and informed me that he had been in the hospital a week, and that I must pay his hospital expenses; also his doctor's bill; also for the time he had lost from his vocation; also for the pants which my dog had ruined."

"When I asked to see his receipts from the hospital and doctor he offered to compromise on my paying \$5 for the damage done his trousers. I offered to pay the five, but insisted on immediate delivery of the garment."

"He was unable to deliver the goods, so it cost me nothing. Still, it was a narrow escape, and I decided that I had better either acquire a lawyer or get rid of the dog."

"While I was pondering a man went by all dressed up in a beetle-tailed coat, with white gloves on like a pall-bearer ready to dance the tango, and the dog fell for him. The apples in the Garden of Eden didn't look near as good to Adam as that man did to my dog, and he got a chunk out of the black legs of that man."

"The tango dancer had a fiery disposition, and what he proposed was not to sue, but to lick the owner of the dog immediately. This made me very uncomfortable, indeed. I hid in the cellar until the storm blew over."

"We got a muzzle for the dog after that, and then he scratched up the neighbor's geraniums. We consoled ourselves that he was a good watch dog, anyway, but one night a burglar got into the house and stepped on him, and that scared the creature so badly that we had to let him sleep in the bed with us after that."

"We tried keeping him in the shed, but he dug out in the night and after announcing his presence by licking us on the face, he crawled in with us, seas and muddy feet, and all."

"So we had to get rid of him."

The Camera in War. Reporting wars with cameras is like hunting big game with a photographic outfit. It gives us something we never had before.

If Gettysburg were fought today the camera would be on Cemetery ridge. Perhaps the talking machine would also be on hand to reproduce for the world "the terrible grumble and rumble and roar" of a battle.

There would be a moving picture worth looking at—films reeling off Pickett's charge and the talking machine records unrolling the crackle of 10,000 rifles!

I wonder if our Victor friends could reproduce a sound as great as the combined roar of Lee's and Meade's 300 and more cannon?

But even with the daring scouts high in air taking photographs of the enemy's positions, and with cameras and phonographs reproducing battles for fireside consumption, war finally comes down to the same old game—men behind the guns shooting the other fellows.—Philadelphia Ledger.

Who Laughs Last.

It was in old Pohick church down in Fairfax county, Virginia, that Washington used to worship, and the ancient town of Alexandria stood much as it stands now on the south bank of the Potomac before the city of Washington had begun to be on the north bank. Pohick also still exists, as the following story proves:

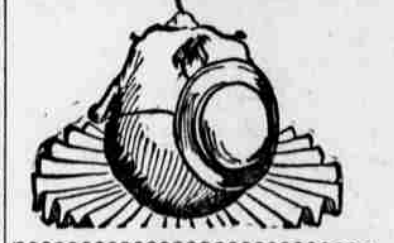
"Washington folks laughs at the Alexandria slow-pokes," mused the Potomac river flat-boatman, "and the Alexandria feller laughs at the Fairfax say-seeds, and the Fairfax guys, they laughs at the one-gallused yaps down a Pohick."

"And Pohick?" queried a curious stranger.

"Oh, none of 'em ain't nuthin' on them Pohick natives," returned the ancient mariner confidently. "Them hill-billies laughs at the po' devils in Washington what has ter wear their to' clo'es an' a clean shirt every single week-day an' has ter come plum' down ter Pohick fer their coon-huntin'." They laughs at 'em, but, mostly, they gittes 'em!"

Thirteenth-Century Fire Prevention. One wonders what fate would have overtaken the captured starter of fires in thirteenth-century London. For after the blaze of 1212, which lasted ten days, swallowed up part of London bridge, and was the cause of over 1,000 deaths, every precaution was taken against fires. For instance, all buildings of houses were ordered to roof them with tiles, shingle boards, or lead, and to stop an outbreak any house could be pulled down. Thus, Mr. H. B. Wheatley on the safeguards: "For the speedy removal of burning houses each ward was to provide a strong iron hook with a wooden handle, two chains, and two strong cords, which were to be left with the bed of the ward, who was also provided with a good horn loudly sounding." And, moreover, every householder was ordered to keep a barrel of water before his door.—London Chronicle.

ON THE FUNNY SIDE



WHAT TROUBLED JIM MURPHY

Not Tobacco Heart, as Physician Had Diagnosed, But the Effects of Cabbage Plant.

They were talking about the doctor and his diagnosis in the lobby of a Washington hotel the other evening when Congressman Thomas G. Patten of New York told of an incident that happened in Gotham.

Some time ago, he said, an esteemed citizen who wasn't enjoying his usual appetite and cheerfulness, consulted a physician, and was told he had tobacco heart. The information he imparted to his sympathetic friends. A few days later one of his friends met the doctor on the street.

"Say, doc," remarked the friend, "did you tell Jim Murphy that he had tobacco heart?"

"Jim Murphy," repeated the doctor, thoughtfully. "Yes, I believe I did. Why?"

"Nothing," was the smiling reply of the friend. "Only if you had ever smoked one of his cigars you would have made the diagnosis cabbage heart."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

Distressing Symptom. "Doctor," said Dennis, the old squire's valet, "don't you think the masher is getting mighty thin?"

"No harm in that, Dennis," said the doctor; "he was too fat. He'll be healthier when he's thinner."

"Loikely he will," said Dennis, disappointedly; "but Ol won't be able to wear his old clothes then."—Grit.

Timely Warning. "What's this game you're tryin' to interduce into Crimmon Gulch?" asked Bronco Bob.

"It's called pinochle," replied the traveling salesman.

"Well, put it away. If some of the boys was to see all them aces comin' out in the same deal, they'd be almost sure to get rattled an' start shootin'."

Efficiency Test. "The head of our concern decided to have everybody undergo an efficiency examination and apportion the jobs accordingly."

"How did it turn out?"

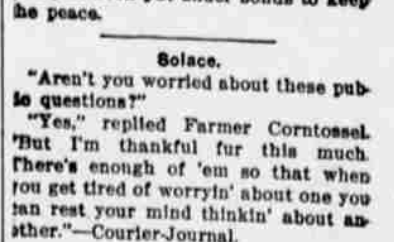
"The office boy won the manager's job and the manager couldn't pass at all."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

A Concession. Grumpy Straphanger (loudly)—I wish you'd move those confounded valises out of the aisle.

Indignant Sitter—Those ain't valises—those are my feet.

Grumpy Straphanger (more cheerfully)—Well, you might at least pile one on top of the other.

TOO LATE.



The Victim—I see that you've arrested the fellow that stole a piece of dress goods from me, and I've come to get my goods.

The Desk Sergeant—I'm sorry, but he's just been put under bonds to keep the peace.

Solace. "Aren't you worried about these public questions?"

"Yes," replied Farmer Cortnessel. "But I'm thankful for this much. There's enough of 'em so that when you get tired of worryin' about one you can rest your mind thinkin' about another."—Courier-Journal.

Assistance. "Is your boy, Josh, any help on the farm?"

"Yes," replied Farmer Cortnessel. "He has told me a whole lot about runnin' an automobile that'll be a great help when I get one."

Delay Insured. "The doctor told me I must quit eatin' rapidly."

"The habit is hard to conquer."

"Yes; but I have managed it. I make it an absolute rule never to tip a waiter."